

# *Client's Choice*

[Implemented in 2000]



Emergency Food Box Program



## ***CLIENT'S CHOICE***

### ***MISSION***

- ❖ Provide an avenue for clients to make positive choices with confidence
- ❖ Direct clients toward self-sufficiency
- ❖ Offer dignity and respect to those we serve
- ❖ Provide choice of nutritious foods for selection
- ❖ Avoid food waste and stretch resources

### ***WHY CONSIDER CLIENT'S CHOICE***

In surveying clients about their experience in coming to a food pantry, some comments were:

**Q. Could you use what you were given?**

**A.** Clients almost unanimously wished pantries would let them help determine what they receive. For example, one received powdered milk, peanut butter and other staples from WIC, but no one at the pantry ever asked what she needs. She received more of the same. What she really needed was meat, fruit, pastas and snacks for her children. Most agree that pre-packing the food results in a lot of waste as they are given things they will not use or don't need while there are many things they really do need.

**Q. What would you most like to get from the food pantry?**

**A.** Meat, fresh fruit and vegetables, bread. Versatile things like pasta and potatoes which can be used in a variety of ways and helps stretch food as far as possible. More breakfast cereal is often requested.

**Q. What do you least want or need that you've received from the pantry?**

**A.** Anything that duplicates what they already have. There is a general complaint that pantry staff do not often ask clients what foods they have or let them choose food they are given. They end up donating these things to food drives.

**Q. What would a "perfect pantry" be?**

**A.** It would be one that trusted the client to choose his own groceries. Many clients express feelings of helplessness and humiliation at not being able to help guide what they or their children would eat.

**Q. When you left the pantry with what you'd been given, how did you feel?**

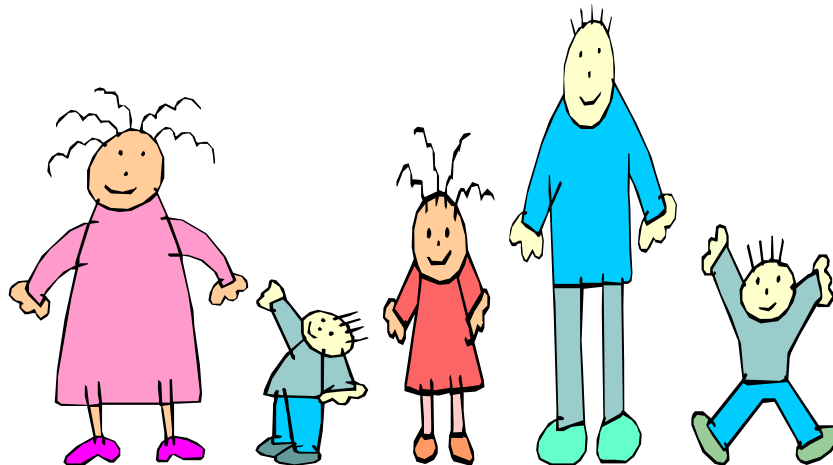
**A.** Though most everyone feels gratitude for the kindness shown them, they also feel sad and humiliated and beaten down.

## WHY GIVE CLIENTS A ROLE IN SELECTING WHAT FOODS THEY ARE GIVEN?

Food is a very emotional and personal subject tied to fundamental drives of sustenance, pleasure and family love. Food is a matter of personal control. Feelings of being in control become increasingly important as people's lives become more challenging.

Quantities & distasteful varieties of the most nutritious food do little good for those it is intended to help. It is far better for clients to be given adequate quantities of even marginally nutritious food that they actually can and do eat. ***Food is not nutritious if they don't eat it!***

Hungry people are the ones who will suffer the consequences of turning food down. A pantry should not make that decision. Clients should be able to choose foods based upon their predetermined need. Letting people make decisions for themselves gives them a sense of responsibility and self-esteem which they do not often experience at their current stage in life.



The following is an excerpt from the *Warwick Beacon* (Rhode Island), May 20, 1999 edition.

In order to improve the efficiency of the flow of food from the pantry out to the community, the Food Bank developed “client choice,” a new model for food distribution adopted by several of our member agencies with much success. Typically, food pantry recipients are given a pre-packed bag of food at each visit regardless of whether or not they like or can use the food they are given. Using the client choice method, the food is arranged supermarket-style on the pantry’s shelves and people are allowed to choose freely the type and amount of food appropriate to their family size and needs.

Client choice is a more efficient way of distributing emergency food to the people who need it most because it eliminates food waste and ensures that recipients are eating nutritious meals they enjoy. More importantly, it returns a sense of dignity and respect to the entire food distribution process. **Our experiences with client choice have proven to us that it is never a mistake to extend trust and compassion to needy people, because they return it with a sense of responsibility and pride. When people in need are trusted with the ability to choose their own food, they no longer feel the unnecessary shame of having to depend on charity to feed their families.** While nothing can completely erase the stigma of reliance, client choice can help. . .

Our experiences have shown that people who visit multiple pantries in one week are not “scamming.” They are simply hungry, and there is much we can do to help them preserve their health and their dignity. **By implementing client choice and allowing hungry people to choose their food just as you or I do – freely and without judgment – we do more than streamline the flow of food to clients and eliminate food waste. We take an important step toward the end of hunger in our state by empowering the people we serve towards positive life choices and self-sufficiency.** *Christine Meehan, Director of Agency Services and Community Outreach, Rhode Island Community Food Bank*

Samples of “shopping lists” given to clients:

## FAMILY OF 1

Baby Food Formula	15 jars/2 boxes of & cereal/2 cans formula
Canned Food	10 cans
Canned meat	1 can
Pasta/cereal/rice flour/dry beans	4 units
Milk	2 packs/cans
Peanut butter	1 jar
Extras	5 items
Eggs	1 dozen
Margarine	1 lb.
Frozen meat	1 package
Bread	Take what you need

## FAMILY OF 6

Baby Food Formula	15 jars/2 boxes of & cereal/2 cans formula
Canned Food	31 cans
Canned meat	4 cans
Pasta/cereal/rice flour/dry beans	15 units
Milk	2 packs/cans
Peanut butter	1 jar
Extras	7 items
Eggs	2 dozen
Margarine	2 lbs.
Frozen meat	2 packages
Bread	Take what you need